

6/5–19/6/2022

# A WINDOW

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Barbara Kapusta

## WORDS SPILL OUT AND SPREAD LIKE FLAMES

How many apocalypses have you survived in your lifetime to tell stories to future generations?

Or better put, how many apocalypses have you missed so far? How many annihilations, exterminations, eradications, devastations, extinctions, eliminations, dooms, genocides, final moments, and passing into oblivion - do you think - can fit into one tiny car? Like a group of performing clowns? There is the Hollywood perspective, the Roland-Emmerich-and-alike-thing, with meteorites and laser beams and tectonic shifts of devastating magnitude, crashing and smashing and running and shouting and falling and sinking and losing and finding. And then there is the daily news, of course, depending on which side of the political spectrum you find yourself, with all the socialists taking your freedom and capitalists taking your livelihood and polar bears, and wars and floating bodies and body bags and tears and ruptured metal and ice caps melted in thick-cut glasses filled with negroni, which one can hardly drink through their face mask, so better enjoy it in isolated solitude, while lamenting about your opponents on the other side of the spectrum. And last but not least, there is the eschatological thing, not necessarily just biblical eschatology, I mean eschatology in general, above time and culture, with apocalypse as a revelation or disclosure. And considering that all have been already disclosed, revealed, narrated, and re-narrated countless times, therefore, voilà, we live through an apocalypse. One might even say, apocalypse now (small caps, no exclamation mark, since this is a truly old piece of news). In any case, congratulations to us.

## THERE ARE HOLES IN WORDS

And then the Catholic theologians - almost entirely out of the blue, as they mostly did - brought to life a significant upgrade to their eschatological system - the concept of Purgatory, based only on tiny snippets in the Scripture, a small piece from Matthew and another one from the Corinthians. And so, they introduced a space, supposedly a real place located somewhere in Ireland, near Jerusalem or elsewhere. A space where the deeds of every single human would be judged and purged by fire. A purifying fire, not a punitive one as in hell. Interestingly enough, they needed to get over the simplistic binary of heaven and hell to get closer to the much more complex eschatology of the ancient Greeks, who used to be offered a chance to transform their fate in the afterlife - on their way through the underworld, up to the Elysian Fields. And so Purgatory came into being - a place for all of Western Christianity (well, for those who agreed on its existence) where everyone comes after the demise of their corporeal shell to have their soul cleansed by fire before embarking on a potential new journey to heaven or wherever else. (Purgatory used to be a horrid place of burning fires and icy slopes until Dante utilized the transformative healing power of the poet and changed the place into a pleasant and calming intermezzo, to establish a gradient of options, a scale of experiences, or rather a spectrum of possibilities for the mortals to atone for their sins.)

## THERE ARE HOLES IN WORDS

The flames kept consuming the city for six endless days. Then the Romans managed to get it under control. Only to witness in horror how the fire reignites and burns for three more days. There is hardly any solid historical evidence supporting the fingers pointing at one human supposedly solely responsible for the fire. Yet it has become common knowledge. A knowledge of hubris, insanity, and pure evil. The emperor was said to be dancing and reciting poetry in his theatrical costume while the flames kept jumping - with a similar vigour - from roof to roof, spreading destruction. The destruction which the emperor himself supposedly flared up. Poor Nero. Overwhelmed by an image created of him by the winning powers. Damn you, Peter Ustinov. Fortunately, in this case, there is a chance to switch to reverse, to re-evaluate, to consider the broader interpretative framework, to unlearn, and to re-narrate. Poor Nero. The product of power-hungry monarchistic genetic toying. And now historians claim that he did not set the city on fire at all. But rather ordered and oversaw a complete infrastructural refit of the ruins of scorched Rome to avoid future fires or minimize their potential danger. And yes, he quite likely murdered his wife. And he loved to dress up as a woman, and as a man, and as a non-human. And he loved the theatre and dreamt of being an actor, which in the highly stratified society of ancient Rome at the time was considered to be on the same social level as sex work. Dear queer Nero, with all your kinks, and desperate need for medication, scapegoated and vilified for long centuries, RIP.

## THERE ARE HOLES IN WORDS

How to formulate a message meant for a temporality so gravely ungraspable to a being whose existence is limited to a century at best? How to speak to the future? To critters and entities inhabiting it? How to warn them of the dangers left behind by a civilization of self-destructive bipedal creatures with ridiculously short and selective memories? In the 80s, an organization called the “Human Interference Task Force” was established to answer these and other questions about the necessity of warning signs around nuclear waste disposal sites spread all over the globe, considering the contingency of our demise, apocalyptic or other. To warn beings from outer space, new species coming after humankind, newly revealed neighbors, and other newcomers. To say: “Hey, we left some shit behind, careful, don’t touch... Pls”. Communication measures need to be conceived to bridge ten millennia and more, to avoid future damage since the damage here and now has already been done, the damage one would hardly desire to pass on. To show a sign, to tell a story, and to relay a sensation or a feeling. ...Especially since the Marshall Islands look like paradise these days. How though, when even religions last only for a few millennia before they dissolve into thin air which they sprang, and when the oldest written record of our civilization, still readable today, is only 5000 years old?

## THERE ARE HOLES IN WORDS

And then a seismologist entered the scene and turned the whole thing around. He said: the main objective of this planet Earth throughout its existence has been to cool itself down. That is, to control and curb the power of the original gigantic explosion of primordial energy of the burning encounter of matter that came together to create this planet. So, the Earth has its own mission and everything taking place on its surface is merely a by-product? A circumstantial coincidence? Or maybe a form of entertainment for the Earth itself to keep it from getting bored while cooling down? Are all those endless apocalypses but cliff-hangers before the next season of the Earth’s favourite TV show? Wouldn’t that be liberating?

## THERE ARE HOLES IN WORDS

So, we entered. And here they are. Barbara’s Giants. The smoothness of their skin seems flawless, its reflective character evokes something that makes one feel calmly humble, almost elevated. And all of that just due to their radiating presence. Upon closer observation, there seemed to be some practically invisible subtle cracks (are those their birthmarks?) interrupting the possible sensation of touching and caressing a floating shape-full liquid...No! Of course, I would not touch them, I’m just sharing their silence while waiting for consent to approach. What a desire. What a pleasure in proxy. Language brings liberation. Simple shifts in the codified norms of naming are the most effective revolutionary tools. The walls of traditional values crack open with new terms, frameworks, spectrally open definitions, and their flourishing habituation and integration into quotidian reality. Yet they remain silent. As if they would not care. As if language was but a flickering grain of dust slowly gravitating towards some long-forgotten history. However, there is a presence of someone else’s urgent, yet gently controlled voice, spreading through the space and embracing their elongated limbs, reaching for the warmth of the metallic liquidity. Are they actually physically here, or are they merely echoes of some digitally rendered reality? Does it even matter? Were there so many holes in their words that they stopped using them and found a better way to communicate? Giants. Graceful, humble giants. Barbara’s Giants, figures finally physically manifested in cast aluminium, after a long happy life on the pages of Barbara’s books and 3D animations of her moving image works, silent, yet truly eloquent. Unknown. Untouched. They seem welcoming. Is there a chance for inter-species dialogue? Inter-species exchange? Can we build things together? Can we formulate thoughts one next to the other? Can we live together and become a commune? Fully utopian socialist beings?

## WORDS SPILL OUT AND SPREAD LIKE FLAMES

...yet there are holes,  
in words  
and most likely in our collectively constructed  
projections of worlds too

JK

BARBARA KAPUSTA (\*1983) lives and works in Vienna. A central, recurring element in her practice is the conjunction of the body with materiality and speech. In her object-like installation and film works, fictional bodies articulate partial perspectives and queer agency, with the aim of challenging a universal, binary societal order. The artist explores current issues regarding the relationship between corporeal identity and an existence determined by technology. The body becomes perceivable as a permeable and malleable medium threatened by fragmentation and heteronomy. Through its own capacity of transformation, however, it likewise possesses a resistant, self-determined potential to withstand access from outside in a techno-human world.

Her recent exhibitions include Lol-Embodied Language, Kunsthaus Hamburg (2022); Enjoy, museum moderner kunst stiftung ludwig wien (2021); dissolving matter & value, Lothringer 13, München (2021); Europa Antike Zukunft, Halle für Kunst Steiermark, Graz (2021); The Leaking Bodies Series, Gianni Manhattan, Vienna (2020); Hypersurface, ACF London (2020); Dangerous Bodies, Kunstraum London (2019); Hysterical Mining, Kunsthalle Wien (2019); We Make the Place by Playing, VIS, Hamburg (2018); Empathic Creatures, Ashley Berlin (2018); The Promise of Total Automation, Kunsthalle Wien (2018).

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Opening hours:  
Mon-Sun: 12:00-19:00  
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